

PROPOSED USE OF THE PLENARY POWERS TO PREVENT THE
DISAPPEARANCE IN SYNONYMY OF THE NAME USED FOR THE
ASTRAKAN HORNED LARK FOR THE LAST EIGHTY YEARS
BY THE SUBSTITUTION THEREFOR OF THE NAME "BEI"
PUBLISHED FOR THAT BIRD BY RIDGWAY IN 1874 AS THE
RESULT OF THE MISREADING OF A MUSEUM
LABEL

By RICHARD MEINERTZHAGEN, D.S.O. (London)

(Commission's reference : Z.N.(S.) 817 : formerly Z.N.(S.) 577)

The purpose of the present application is to ask the International Commission to use its Plenary Powers to provide a valid basis for the continued use of the name *brandti* Dresser, December 1874, as published in the combination *Otocorys brandti*, for the Astrakan subspecies of the Horned Lark by suppressing the name *bei* Ridgway, Feb. 1874, as published in the combination *Eremophila alpestris* var. *bei*, as the result of the misreading of a museum label.

2. The present case was first brought to notice in a letter dated 11th June 1951 addressed by the late James L. Peters (*Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard College, Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.*) to Mr. Francis Hemming, Secretary to the International Commission, the question of principle involved in which was placed on the Agenda for the Copenhagen (1953) nomenclature meetings as Case No. 35 (1953, *Bull. zool. Nomencl.* 10 : 357—359). The facts of this case are as follows :—

- (1) In 1869 the United States National Museum obtained a collection of bird skins from the dealer Wilhelm Schlüter. One of these was that of a Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris* (Linnaeus)=*Alauda alpestris* Linnaeus, 1758, *Syst. Nat.* (ed. 10) 1 : 166) which bore the label "*Alauda alpestris*/var. : *bei* Astrakan".
- (2) The foregoing label was misread by Ridgway as meaning that either the collector or the dealer from whom this specimen was obtained had given the manuscript name "*bei*" to the Astrakan subspecies of the Horned Lark. Ridgway published a description of this subspecies under this "name" in 1874 (in Baird, Brewer & Ridgway, *Hist. N. Amer. Birds*, Land Birds 2 : 141, 142). This appeared in February 1874.
- (3) In 1874 Dresser (*Hist. Birds Europe* 4(32) : 397, 402) described the same subspecies of the Horned Lark under the name *Otocorys brandti*. The Part of Dresser's book containing this name appeared in December 1874.

- (4) The bird in question has ever since been known by Dresser's name *brandti* but technically that name is a junior subjective synonym of the name *bei* Ridgway which, as shown above, has ten months' priority.

3. When this case was considered by the Fourteenth International Congress of Zoology, Copenhagen, 1953, it was decided not to insert a provision in Article 25 denying availability to names of this kind, the Congress placing on record its view that such cases could be dealt with more conveniently by the use by the International Commission of its Plenary Powers (1953, *Copenhagen Decisions zool. Nomencl.* : 65, Decision 119).

4. It would, in my opinion, be a reproach to zoologists to permit the use as a scientific name of a term such as *bei* which owes its publication to a ridiculous mistake. Moreover, the acceptance of this name in place of *brandti* Dresser which has been in continuous use for over eighty years would clearly run counter to the principle laid down in the Preamble prefixed to the *Règles* by the Copenhagen Congress that one of the primary objects of the *Règles* is to promote stability in nomenclature and that the Commission's Plenary Powers exist for the purpose of dealing with cases where that object is threatened (1953, *Copenhagen Decisions zool. Nomencl.* : 22, Decision 19).

5. I therefore ask the International Commission :—

- (1) to use its Plenary Powers to suppress the name *bei* Ridgway, 1874, as published in the combination *Eremophila alpestris* var. *bei*, for the purposes of the Law of Priority but not for those of the Law of Homonymy ;
- (2) to place the under-mentioned specific names on the *Official List of Specific Names in Zoology* :—
- (a) *alpestris* Linnaeus, 1758, as published in the combination *Alauda alpestris* ;
- (b) *brandti* Dresser, 1874, as published in the combination *Otocorys brandti* ;
- (3) to place the name *bei* Ridgway, 1874, as published in the combination *Eremophila alpestris* var. *bei*, as suppressed under the Plenary Powers under (1) above, on the *Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology*.

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